



CHAPTER II

Characteristics of a Cohesive Army

EVIDENCE OF COHESION in an army must be sought where it occurs—at the small-unit level among the intimate, face-to-face groups that emerge in peacetime as well as in war. As already defined, military cohesion involves the bonding of members of a unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the organization, and the mission.¹ In view of the general consensus of what a cohesive army is, any ordering of characteristics of such an army must consider the following areas: the overall organizational structure, which includes the party, army, or other sources of goals, policy, and support; the “human element” or the small intimate groups that control and motivate soldiers through their norms; and the influence of the leader on the small group and the resulting commitment of the individual soldier toward achieving army goals.

The only level in an army where these three factors simultaneously occur—and therefore the most appropriate focus of research on cohesion—is that point at which the organization, the small group, and the leader come together in an army: the lower levels of the organization. Squad, platoon, and section-level units are ideal for this approach because the formal organization is evident at this level, because it is possible to observe how small-group

members respond as individuals within these organizations, and because leadership techniques and their impact on the small group are also visible at this level.

Organizational Characteristics

Perhaps the primary function of the organization is to provide purpose to the cohesive unit in the form of goals and objectives. If the purpose of war is the achievement of political ends, then the overall organization of an army must serve to transmit these political goals through a "chain of command" to those specific units ultimately charged with accomplishing the goals.² In this way, the broad, political purposes of a party or a nation penetrate the small cohesive group.

Another function of organizational top management is to provide the varied support required by lower-level cohesive units. Personnel and logistical support, as well as policies designed to promote cohesion, is required of the organization and is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

A final function of the organization is to prescribe structural characteristics for the small unit that will promote cohesion. The purpose of these structural characteristics is to de-emphasize individualism within the soldier. Instead, the small unit is structured to promote responsibility. The soldier is constantly reminded of his responsibilities to his buddies, to his leaders, to the squad, to the platoon, and ultimately to the people and the nation or party through the structure of his immediate unit.

Certain organizational characteristics are thus important: the size of the group, for example, takes on added significance, because cohesion is inversely proportional to the numbers in the group. Several armies, in fact, have determined that the ideal size is up to nine men, with some armies choosing a three-man unit or military cell, which becomes the basic personnel building block of the army. Another factor is the soldier's belief about the duration of his commitment to the unit. Cohesion is promoted the longer the soldier anticipates remaining in his unit. And the frequency with which soldiers associate with each other is also important. The greater the frequency of association in pursuit of common purposes, the greater the cohesion. Finally, the more fully structured the associations among soldiers within the group become,

the more influence the unit will have over the soldiers. Structured associations also serve to establish boundaries around the group and form a clear distinction between members and nonmembers, or between "us" and "them."³

Small Group and Unit Characteristics

Small, cohesive units usually have several discernible characteristics. The unit serves as a basic, tactical, fire-and-maneuver or service unit. The cohesive unit must function as a "buddy group" capable of satisfying basic physiological and social needs for the individual soldier. Another characteristic is the presence of a dominant group, which controls the day-to-day behavior of the soldier. The leader operates within this group to ensure that group norms or expectations of behavior are congruent with organizational objectives. A final characteristic is the existence of an observation-and-reporting system that is self-correcting for deviance from group norms by mobilizing peer groups or leadership pressures in order to correct individual behavior.

Leadership Characteristics

Leadership is the most important factor in achieving congruence between unit norms and organizational objectives. For leaders to be effective in influencing the emergence of norms compatible with organizational objectives, leadership must be based upon personal relationships between leaders and soldiers, rather than upon an impersonal managerial style.⁴ Specific functions characterize effective leadership in a cohesive unit. The leader must transmit organizational goals or objectives effectively from the chain of command to the small, cohesive group. Then he must lead the unit in achieving these objectives through his personal influence and technical expertise. The leader must also maintain unit cohesion by ensuring continuous organizational support and by the detection and correction of deviance from group norms. Finally, the leader assists in making or maintaining an ideologically-sound soldier by setting an example, by teaching, and by indoctrinating.

Because the organization, the individual soldier, and the leader all come together in the small unit, this

level is best suited for investigating the degree of cohesion in an army. Small, cohesive units are characterized by specific functions. To summarize:

1. Functions of the larger organization are to
 - a. establish goals and objectives;
 - b. provide support;
 - c. prescribe small-unit policies for
 - (1) numbers (cohesion is inverse to size);
 - (2) duration (the longer, the stronger cohesion becomes);
 - (3) frequency (the more association, the more cohesion is promoted);
 - (4) structure (the more structured the relationships, the more cohesion is promoted).
2. Functions of the small unit are to
 - a. serve as a "buddy group" satisfying basic needs of the soldier;
 - b. serve as a dominant group controlling behavior of soldiers, within which the leader acts to ensure group norms are congruent with organizational objectives;
 - c. provide a mutual observation and reporting system that mobilizes peer and leader pressures to correct individual deviance;
 - d. serve as a basic, tactical, fire-and-maneuver or operational unit.
3. Functions of the leader are to
 - a. transmit organization goals to the small group;
 - b. lead the unit in achieving goals;
 - c. maintain desired small-group norms by ensuring organizational support and detection and correction of deviance;
 - d. create or maintain an ideologically sound soldier through setting example, teaching, or indoctrination.